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ABSTRACT

The USS Constitution, one of the original three frigates in the U.S. Navy, celebrated its 190th anniversary in 1987. To commemorate this event and to study the naval history of frigates, five exercises were created that detail the history and focus on the USS Constitution. The exercises begin with a fill-in-the-blank test that teaches students about the planning of the original U.S. frigates in the 1790s, while the second test is multiple choice and traces the history of frigates from 1652 to 1800. The USS Constitution, the USS Constellation, and the USS United States are the answers to the matching test in part 3. In part 4, the War of 1812 is the focus, and the naval battles are captured in a narrative with questions following. The USS Constitution is memorialized in Oliver Wendell Holmes' poem "Old Ironsides," and part 5 involves reading the poem and writing an essay on the fate of this frigate. Answers to the tests in parts 1-4 are provided. (DJC).

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by

Valerie Vos

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FRIGATES

BY

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October 21, 1987, marked the 190th anniversary of the USS CONSTITUTION, one of the original six frigates in the United States Navy. A frigate is a fast moving, heavily armed vessel with a lofty rig. The following exercises detail the birth of the frigate and especially the USS CONSTITUTION and its involvement in the War of 1812.

PART I NARRATIVE-THE PLANNING BEGINS-Use the word box to fill in the blanks.

Young Josiah Fox immigrated from a._____ to b._____ in c._____ to study d._____ with Joshua Humphreys. Secretary of State e._____, under George Washington's term, contracted Humphreys to build f._____ frigates. These were the g._____ ships of the United States Navy. Together, these men designed thirty-eight and forty-four gun frigates. They submitted their plans to Secretary Knox for approval. Knox assigned each frigate to a separate h._____ for construction. The first step was completed.

Each frigate required lumber from i. _____ trees. The preferred choice was j. _____ for its toughness and density. It was considered five times stronger than the k. _____ used by the Europeans. Knox assigned a l. _____ to each ship to monitor the shipbuilding and make any necessary alterations. The ships were progressing well until m. _____ when the building came to an abrupt halt. The Senate had ratified a Peace Treaty with the Day of Algiers halting all military activities. With a few months left in office, n. _____ persuaded Congress to find the funds to finish o. _____ ships. Yet unnamed, Washington decided to breathe life into the frigates by naming the first three. The Philadelphia frigate became the p. _____, the Baltimore frigate became the q. _____, and the Boston frigate became the r. _____.

WORD BOX

live oak	shipyard	England	first	Henry Knox
white oak	six	America	shipbuilding	captain
1793	3,000	March 2, 1796	three	CONSTELLATION
CONSTITUTION	UNITED STATES	George Washington		

PART II MULTIPLE CHOICE-The Frigates are Launched

1. When John Adams became President he established the

Navy Department and appointed its first Secretary, who was:

a. Benjamin Stoddert b. Isaac Hull c. Edward Preble

2. Frigates are rated by their:
 - a. sailing speed
 - b. gun capacity
 - c. number of sails
3. The first frigate was built in 1652 by the:
 - a. Spanish
 - b. Portuguese
 - c. English
4. The British Royal Navy thought the Yankee frigates were:
 - a. beautiful
 - b. freakish
 - c. indestructible
5. The first frigate to see battle was the:
 - a. CONSTITUTION
 - b. CONSTELLATION
 - c. UNITED STATES
6. This battle took place in the Caribbean against the:
 - a. French
 - b. English
 - c. Spanish
7. The opposing vessel was the:
 - a. GUERRIERE
 - b. INSURGENTE
 - c. BELVIDERA
8. The battle lasted:
 - a. 6 hours
 - b. 12 hours
 - c. 75 minutes
9. In 1798, Congress began completion of the three remaining frigates. The forth frigate was the CHESAPEAKE launched June 20, 1799. It had a:
 - a. career of back luck.
 - b. poor frame and was scrapped
 - c. speed greater than all the other frigates.
10. The fifth frigate was the CONGRESS launched August 15, 1799. It had a:
 - a. career of bad luck
 - b. poor frame and was scrapped
 - c. speed greater than all the other frigates.

11. The sixth frigate was the PRESIDENT launched April 1, 1800.

It had a:

- a. career of bad luck b. poor frame and was scrapped
- c. speed greater than all the other frigates.

PART III MATCHING-Match the frigate to its correlating event.

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. First frigate launched May 10, 1797. | A. USS CONSTELLATION |
| 2. Crashed into the water and damaged its rudder. | B. USS CONSTITUTION |
| 3. Permanently scarred, earned the nickname, "Old Wagon". | C. USS UNITED STATES |
| 4. Slowest of the three vessels. | |
| 5. Picture perfect launch on September 7, 1797. | |
| 6. Launch date September 20, 1797 only to find out it would not enter the water. | |
| 7. Successfully relaunched October 21, 1797. | |
| under the guidance of Colonial Claghorne. | |
| 8. Quickly captured the heart of Massachusetts. | |
| 9. Built by New Englanders. | |
| 10. 38 gun rating but actually carried 48 guns. | |
| 11. 44 gun rating but actually carried 50 guns. | |
| 12. 44 gun rating but actually carried 60 guns. | |

PART IV-The War OF 1812 Begins

By 1812, the impressive fleet of fifty-four ships had deteriorated to seventeen. President James Madison and Secretary of the Navy, Paul Hamilton, believed their small fleet of ships should stay close to home ports but the Navy commanders thought differently. These men, including Captain William Bainbridge, knew their ships were strong and the men who operated them even stronger. Bainbridge explained to Madison that the British were too busy fighting the French and Spanish. "They underrate our abilities. Our ships have greater innovative techniques, larger guns and travel at faster speeds." After listening to Bainbridge Madison agreed to let the fleet out into the open sea and fight.

The USS PRESIDENT set sail on June 21, 1812. On June 23rd, Commodore John Rogers fired the opening shot that signified the start of the war at the British frigate, BELVIDERA. After three days of fighting, Rogers failed to capture the ship and returned home.

On August 2, 1812, Commodore Isaac Hull of the USS CONSTITUTION set out to sea. On the 19th he was 200 miles east of Halifax, Nova Scotia, and spotted the British frigate, GUERRIERE. Captain James Dacres fired the first shots on the CONSTITUTION. Hull did not fire. He waited until he was within fifty yards, then twenty-five yards before giving his command. "Now boys, pour it

into them!" The entire side of the GUERRIERE caved in. The CONSTITUTION continued firing until the mast of the GUERRIERE fell into the waters. This momentous battle lasted forty-five minutes. In over one hundred years, no British ship had suffered such casualties. Hull extended a hand to the injured Dacres and brought all the wounded aboard. Hull asked Dacres what last wishes he could do before blowing up the remains of the GUERRIERE. Dacres responded, "My mother's Bible." Hull ordered to retrieve it and then destroyed the vessel.

August 30th, the CONSTITUTION returned to Boston with cheers from the crowd. Hull was a modest man and could not deal with all the notoriety. He said, "The less there is to be said about a brilliant act, the better." Family matters began to affect Hull and he requested time away from the Navy. He was replaced by Captain William Bainbridge on September 15, 1812. The British were stunned by their defeat of the GUERRIERE. The Duke of Wellington said, "I have been very uneasy about the American Naval successes. I think we should have peace with America."

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Who was President of the United States at the opening of the War of 1812?
2. The Navy fleet had deteriorated to seventeen ships by 1812. How might this have happened?

3. Why might you think the British had a very low opinion of the United States Navy and its officers?
4. Who fired the first shot starting the War of 1812? When did this take place?
5. Why was the USS PRESIDENT unsuccessful in capturing the BELVIDERA?
6. Why did Captain Hull wait until he was within twenty-five yards before firing at the GUERRIERE?
7. Why did Hull destroy the GUERRIERE after retrieving all the wounded?
8. Did the USS CONSTITUTION have continued successes following this initial battle?
9. Why did Captain Hull retire his command of the CONSTITUTION?
10. What was the reaction of the British following the destruction of the GUERRIERE?

PART V-Preserving The Mistress of the Seas

By 1830, the USS CONSTITUTION was the greatest frigate afloat. But her time had come, she was about to be scraped. A young Harvard graduate, Oliver Wendell Holmes, came to her aid. Deeply concerned about her fate, Holmes wrote a poem that began:

Oh better that her shattered hulk
Should sink beneath the wave;
Her thunders shook the mighty deep,
And there should be her grave.

The poem caused such an uproar that Congress responded with funds to restore this great vessel. By 1833, the CONSTITUTION was back in full service. In 1897, the ship was drydocked in its home port of Boston. Again, Congress set aside funds to restore the CONSTITUTION. "Old Ironsides", as she was more commonly called after the battle with the GUERRIERE, was commissioned back into service. On May 7, 1934, the CONSTITUTION returned to Boston where she rests today-a museum and tribute to the history of our country.

ESSAY

Read Holmes' poem, "OLD IRONSIDES." Write an essay on how the poem affected the outcome of the CONSTITUTION.

ANSWERS

PART I-Narrative

a. England b. America c. 1793 d. shipbuilding e. Henry Knox
f. six g. first h. shipyard i. 3,000 j. live oak k. white oak
l. captain m. March 2, 1796 n. George Washington o. three
p. UNITED STATES q. CONSTELLATION r. CONSTITUTION

PART II-Multiple Choice

1. a 2. b 3. b 4. b 5. b 6. a 7. b 8. c 9. a 10. b 11. c

PART III-Matching

1. c 2. c 3. c 4. c 5. a 6. b 7. b 8. b 9. b 10. a 11. c
12. b

PART IV-Questions

1. James Madison
2. Previous battles, slowdown in construction
3. The actual size of the Navy and lack of experience of its officers.
4. USS PRESIDENT; June 21, 1812
5. Speed, accurate shooting, experienced officers
6. Precise aim at the midside
7. Destroyed beyond repair; gave the ship a decent burial
8. Yes
9. To be with his family
10. Astonishment